

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of associating windows in a GUI environment into one or more affinity groups by a user and accessing the windows as a group, comprising:
 - providing a GUI environment including a plurality of windows;
 - establishing, by a user, a first affinity group comprising a subset of two or more but less than all of said plurality of windows in said GUI environment, such that the windows comprising said first affinity group are related; and
 - raising the z-order of windows in said first affinity group above other windows in said GUI environment when any one window in said first affinity group is selected.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein raising the z-order of windows in said first affinity group above other windows in said GUI environment when any one window in said first affinity group is selected comprises raising all windows in said first affinity group to the top level z-order of said GUI environment.
3. The method of claim 2 further comprising tiling the windows in said first affinity group such that said windows may simultaneously occupy the top level z-order of said GUI environment.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein raising the z-order of windows in said first affinity group above other windows in said GUI environment when any one window in said first affinity group is selected comprises raising the selected window to the top level z-order of said GUI environment, and raising all other windows in said first affinity group to one or more z-order levels immediately below the top level.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein establishing said first affinity group of windows comprises designating an affinity relationship between existing windows in said GUI by the user.
6. The method of claim 5 wherein designating an affinity relationship between existing windows by the user comprises:
 - selecting a first window;
 - dragging said first window to an affinity group icon on a second window; and
 - dropping said first window on said affinity group icon of said second window, thereby establishing an affinity group relationship between said first and second window.
7. The method of claim 6, further comprising:
 - selecting a third window;
 - dragging said third window to an affinity group icon on either said first or second window;
 - and
 - dropping said third window on said affinity group icon of said first or second window, thereby adding said third window to said affinity group.
8. The method of claim 5 wherein designating an affinity relationship between existing windows by the user comprises:
 - selecting a first window;
 - executing a first keystroke combination in said first window;
 - selecting a second window; and
 - executing a second keystroke combination in said second window, thereby establishing an affinity group relationship between said first and second window.

9. The method of claim 8, further comprising:
 - selecting a third window;
 - executing said first keystroke combination in said third window;
 - selecting either said first or second window; and
 - executing said second keystroke combination in said selected first or second window,
thereby adding said third window to said affinity group.
10. The method of claim 1 wherein establishing said first affinity group of windows comprises creating one or more new windows from an existing window by the user, said existing window and said new windows having an affinity group relationship.
11. The method of claim 10, wherein creating one or more new windows from an existing window by the user comprises:
 - selecting an existing window; and
 - creating a first new window by executing an affinity group window creation command;
whereby said first new window created has an affinity group relationship with said existing window.
12. The method of claim 11, further comprising:
 - selecting either said existing window or said first new window; and
 - creating a second new window by executing an affinity group window creation command;
whereby said second new window created has an affinity group relationship with said existing window and said first new window.
13. The method of claim 1 wherein said GUI environment includes virtual desktops.

14. A method of switching between two or more groups of windows in a GUI environment, comprising:

providing a GUI environment including a plurality of windows, said windows divided into at least first and second affinity groups, each said affinity group comprising two or more but less than all of said plurality of windows;

raising the windows of said first affinity group to a z-order level above the windows of said second affinity group in said GUI environment in response to the user selecting a window in said first affinity group; and

raising the windows of the second affinity group to a z-order level above the windows of said first affinity group in said GUI environment in response to the user selecting a window in said second affinity group.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein said second affinity group comprises all windows in said GUI environment not otherwise included in an affinity group.

16. The method of claim 14 wherein raising the z-order of windows in said first affinity group comprises raising all windows in said first affinity group to the top level z-order of said GUI environment.

17. The method of claim 16 further comprising tiling the windows in said first affinity group such that said windows may simultaneously occupy the top level z-order of said GUI environment.

18. The method of claim 14 wherein raising the z-order of windows in said first affinity group comprises raising the selected window to the top level z-order of said GUI environment, and raising all other windows in said first affinity group to one or more z-order levels immediately below the top level.

19. A computer system, comprising:
 - a display device;
 - at least one input device; and
 - a processor programmed to display a GUI environment including a plurality of windows and a plurality of z-order levels on said display device, said GUI environment operative to allow a user to form affinity groups of said windows via said input device and to select one said window to receive a GUI environment window focus, such that when a window in an affinity group receives said window focus, all windows within said affinity group rise to one or more z-order levels higher than all windows not within said affinity group.
20. The computer system of claim 19 wherein when a window in an affinity group receives said window focus, all windows within said affinity group rise to the highest z-order level of said GUI environment.
21. The computer system of claim 20 wherein all windows within said affinity group are tiled to fit within the highest z-order level of said GUI environment.
22. The computer system of claim 19 wherein when a window in an affinity group receives said window focus, the window receiving said focus rises to the highest z-order level of said GUI environment, and all other windows within said affinity group rise to z-order levels directly below said highest level.

23. The computer system of claim 19 wherein said at least one input device includes a mouse, and wherein said GUI environment is operative to allow a user to form affinity groups of said windows by dragging a first said window and dropping it on a window group icon on a second said window, thereby forming an affinity group relationship between said first and second windows.

24. The computer system of claim 19 wherein said at least one input device includes a keyboard, and wherein said GUI environment is operative to allow a user to form affinity groups of said windows by successively entering one or more window group keystroke combinations into first and second said windows, thereby forming an affinity group relationship between said first and second windows.

25. A computer readable medium which stores computer-executable process steps for a GUI environment including a plurality of windows and a plurality of z-order levels, said computer-executable process steps causing a computer to perform the steps of:

displaying said GUI environment on a display device;

accepting, from a user, designation of a first affinity group comprising a subset of two or more but less than all of said plurality of windows in said GUI environment, such that the windows comprising said first affinity group are related; and

raising the z-order of windows in said first affinity group above other windows in said GUI environment when any one window in said first affinity group is selected.

26. The computer readable medium of claim 25 wherein raising the z-order of windows in said first affinity group above other windows in said GUI environment when any one window in said first affinity group is selected comprises raising all windows in said first affinity group to the top level z-order of said GUI environment.

27. The computer readable medium of claim 26 further comprising tiling the windows in said first affinity group such that said windows may simultaneously occupy the top level z-order of said GUI environment.

28. The computer readable medium of claim 25 wherein raising the z-order of windows in said first affinity group above other windows in said GUI environment when any one window in said first affinity group is selected comprises raising the selected window to the top level z-order of said GUI environment, and raising all other windows in said first affinity group to one or more z-order levels immediately below the top level.